Talking with Children about Military Deployment

These times can be difficult for all of us. The uncertainty of war can be very stressful and frightening for military families. It is important to remember to include children when planning for possible deployment. Here are some typical reactions children may have, and some tips on how to speak with them.

Common reactions in children:

Fear — "What if something bad happens?"

Helplessness — "There's nothing I can do about any of this."

Anger — "Why does my (dad/mom) have to go?"

Confusion — "What is happening? I don't understand all this."

Loneliness — "I don't want you to go."

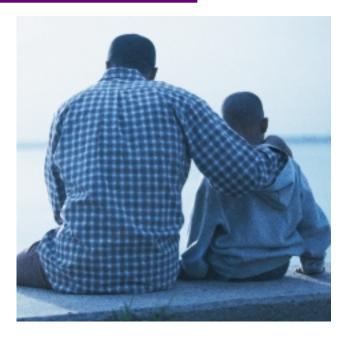
Common behaviors you may see in your children:

Aggressiveness — at home, at school, with playmates or siblings

Misbehaving — unusual acting out or oppositional behavior

Regression — bedwetting, sleep disturbances, thumb-sucking, tantrums

Withdrawal — unusually quiet, reclusive, disinterested in activities or friends



Clingy — often present in young children who are experiencing separation anxiety

Changes in eating or sleep habits

Suggestions for helping your children cope:

- Talk to children on their level. When trying to explain complicated concepts to young children (such as what war is or why it might happen), use examples from children's books, stories, or even cartoons.
- When talking about these complex matters with older children, it sometimes helps to introduce the subject, just say a few things and then wait to see if the child has questions. Sometimes older kids don't want to know much or may need to mentally shield themselves from their fear and sadness. You know your child best. Try to "read" her or his reaction to what you are saying and adjust your approach accordingly.



- Encourage children to talk about the situation and ask questions. However, if discussing it seems to upset your child too much, you may want to space out these discussions over time or be sure to follow them with something pleasurable, like playing a game, watching a favorite video, or reading a book.
- Limit your child's access to TV and media coverage about the military situation, particularly if he or she seems to be having strong emotional and behavioral reactions.
- Pay close attention to your child's behavior, especially changes like withdrawal or aggression. Children often show depression differently than adults, and you should be vigilant for any signs of abrupt, intense or chronic mood or behavior changes.
- The person who is leaving should be realistic and honest about how long he or she may be gone. Be careful about making predictions that are overly optimistic.





- If you are the one who is being deployed, reassure your children that you will do everything you can to be safe, and let them know how you will be contacting them. Be careful about making promises about how often you'll be in contact if you aren't certain you can keep them.
- During this time, children often need much more adult attention and involvement. If you are being deployed, maximize your time with your child before leaving. If you are the one remaining home, dedicate more time to being with your children.
- Notify child care providers and/or teachers of the situation. Educate them about possible behavior changes, and encourage them to contact you if they have concerns.